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ABSTRACT

The creative drama program at Illinois State University is part of an interdisciplinary approach to teacher education. Over the past five years, Illinois State University, which currently has one of the largest elementary teacher education programs in the country, has developed a core curriculum which consists of: the arts (Core I), communication (Core II), and the natural and social sciences (Core III). Each core lasts one semester and in the fourth part of the program, students teach full-time under supervision. Art, music, drama, dance, child growth, and curriculum are the major areas of study included in Core I. The primary objective of Core I is to make future elementary teachers aware of the potential of the arts for developing students' self- and group-awareness. An effective method of achieving this objective is to involve future elementary teachers in creative dramatics. In so doing, they become equipped to supervise, within the elementary school classroom, creative dramatics activities which are designed to sensitize students to their individual potentials and to encourage them to share their experiences in group situations. (EE)

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CREATIVE DRAMA IN AN ARTS EDUCATION PROGRAM: CORE I AT ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY.

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There are, inevitably it seems, major problems in discussing Aesthetic Education or Arts Education. These problems relate specifically to the combining of the Arts area, be it dance, music, theatre or art (and the artist) with education (and the teacher). There are many artists, people who dabble in the arts, pseudo-artists and those who make their living off the arts (off rather than in) who talk quite loudly, and often quite rightly, about the integrity of the art or the art form, especially when mention is made of education and young people. Such questions as "How can the arts be used in education?" or "What aspects of this art form are useful for the classroom and how?" worry and even horrify many people interested in maintaining the integrity of the arts. Yet it is such issues that need to be raised and examined in Arts Education. Art is not just for the artists who produce it and education should not be elitist in any shape or form.

There is a definite need for positive and strong arts education programs in our schools. Such programs should not be encouraged in order to develop the arts - the major goal always to be kept in mind is the development of the participant, the child in the classroom.

Now the place for the arts in education has too often been seen as sacred - reserved for a few, or as a special program sponsored by the principal as a pet project. This is too true for many theatre programs where the performance is a showcase

or remains aloof from the core of the educational process - the everyday classroom situation. For the arts to become a part of education teachers will have to find ways in which arts activities can be used in the ongoing, day-to-day situation.

All the arts should be made available to the young student; in this paper the focal point will be a creative drama program for Teacher Education in which the author works. However, this program is part of an interdisciplinary approach and such an approach seems eminently sensible because the shared areas of the arts, their common bases, are most useful in the classroom.

Creative drama is a term used to describe a process of teaching that is based on the child's spontaneous play and is designed to allow the child to develop through the drama activities. Creative drama does not train the child to be an actor. It is not performance oriented nor meant to be shown as a finished product to an audience of outsiders. It is necessary to distinguish between drama and theatre activity for communication between actors and an audience is not part of creative drama.

Creative drama is concerned with the whole of the doing of life, and involves the dramatic playing out of situations so that the possibilities of life can be explored. It is an activity of physical and mental involvement based on improvisation

and playmaking. It involves action - the translation into physical terms of ideas and emotions. This action can involve individuals working by themselves, or working together as a group. The activity stresses the growth of self-awareness and within the group an awareness of other people and their needs. In creative drama people learn to develop their unique positive qualities and to share with others in a group situation.

Many teachers use creative drama in the classroom and teachers in training are often advised to take a university course in creative drama. At Illinois State University there is a strong creative drama program but for students in Elementary Education the drama is not taught by itself. It is a part of a core program in the Arts, a new program designed to better equip future teachers for the classroom.

There are several ways the arts can be introduced to the classroom. One way is to have artists share some of their time working with children. Such involvement is not uncommon in some schools but often the children's part in the session is non-participatory, except as audience members. Another way to broaden the exposure of children to arts activities is to make the classroom teacher more aware of the potential of the arts. This is the immediate goal of the Core I program at Illinois State.

With a long tradition in teacher education (dating from its inception in 1857) Illinois State University currently has one of the largest Elementary Education programs in the country. Core I is part of an overall Core program developed over the last five years to replace the traditional "bits and pieces" approach to teacher training.

The Core program was devised to provide a learning situation in which students could best achieve competency in those complex tasks, skills and techniques needed for the classroom. Three major curriculum areas were identified and one core in the program was developed for each area. The core areas are: The Arts (Core I), Communication (Core II), and the Natural and Social Sciences (Core III). Each core lasts one semester and in the fourth part of the program the students teach full-time under supervision.

Students enter Core I in the first semester of their Junior year. They enrol for twelve hours of credit of Core I which is made up of Art, Music, Drama, Dance, Child Growth and Curriculum. The arts subjects are taught by specialists from the various departments of the Fine Arts. Basically the students are scheduled for four hours a day, five days a week either 8-12, or 12-4 Monday through Friday. This teaching framework allows for flexibility and a degree of freedom in scheduling that moves away from the more conventional pattern of meeting a class at a set hour on a set day each week. For example drama does not meet Monday, Wednesday,

Friday, from 2-3 for the whole semester. The drama teacher may choose to meet his students for three two-hour sessions one week, or for two one-hour sessions in another week. Such an approach allows for in-depth work and a variety of strategies - a drama class was able to work for four straight hours developing an improvisation sequence. Students know they are "in Core" all morning, or all afternoon, and can focus their energies accordingly.

Most of the students in Core I have had little or no experience in the arts. The emphasis in Core I is not to train the students to become highly skilled artists, though certain skills and awarenesses are taught. The purpose is to develop in each student a heightened awareness of the possibilities of living through exploration experiences in the arts. This is done through participatory experiences involving the senses, movement, rhythms, sounds and language - to develop a broader and deeper sensitivity to the experiences that shape our existence, our being as people. Then ways are explored to shape and give understanding to the experience by using one or more of the various forms of expression in the arts. Through this program each student gains insights into himself and the world in which he moves as well as learning a variety of approaches he can utilize in his own classroom.

The Core I program is very much a "doing" or participatory program. Students learn by experiencing - theory is revealed

and tested in practice. The students paint and sculpt, they create music, develop their own improvisations and work through movement skills as well as discussing and planning approaches for using these activities in the elementary classroom. And to ensure an in-depth exploration the students work in the Arts experience for a whole semester as the full-time commitment to this part of the core program. In fact, over one-third of the total university involvement in the Core program is spent in the Arts.

Teaching in the Core program is an exciting and stimulating experience with new freedoms and new pressures. Weekly planning meetings are held to map out the next week's schedule and the teachers have to decide in advance what kinds of things they are going to do and what amount of time is needed to best accomplish them. These planning meetings bring the Core instructors together and a sharing of ideas and approaches results. Time slots are negotiated and the possibilities for the week are outlined. Thus it is impossible not to know what other teachers are doing and discussions as to purpose and methods often occur. As student representatives attend the planning meetings their reactions are considered along with those of their teachers.

It is not uncommon for teachers to work with each other - an area of child development, self-concept, can be closely linked with the self-awareness work in drama. In one of the units of Core I Art and drama are being team-taught as one area and it is hoped that more team-teaching in the arts will eventuate. It is sometimes difficult for specialists in a field to see

a wider field encompassing a number of areas but the nature and philosophy of the Core I program is helping to bring about a sharing of ideas and approaches between the various teachers.

Teachers visit each other's classes to see what is taking place and units of work are sometimes handled together. Movement in space through drama can be linked with movement activities of dance and the creating of rhythms in music. The regular planning meetings, similar approaches to the arts and the close involvement with students has brought about the need to discover what the other teachers do and how they work. The move is to broaden the concept from teaching a subject per se to one of teaching a subject within an Arts program. This is not always easy to live with, especially when a teacher has developed his specialised approach in an area - but the pressure of the program encourages a wide base and often the students request this. They want to know how they can integrate art with drama, drama with music and the teachers are committed to showing them how by actually doing it. The purpose is to teach about teaching through the actual experience rather than telling about it.

This writer has been involved in Core I for three semesters and it has been a challenging and exciting experience. Creative drama has fitted into the program well for in many ways it can be the basis out of which other arts can be developed. Work in sense-awareness and movement have been used as preparatory steps for an art lesson in color and texture. A series of surreal slides made by the students became the moving background for

work in mime to express a dream sequence in which movement, mime and sound were combined with the work in art. In this sequence a definite story line was developed using techniques learned in drama.

What is evolving from this combining of the arts is an awareness of basic ingredients - shape, color, form, rhythm, sound, movement in space. The students take these and play with them in a learning experience in the arts. The results have been rewarding and often astounding.

The Core I program is one way to prepare the classroom teacher to use the arts with his or her children. The program is ongoing and developing. Very few teacher education programs give as much time to the arts and it is hoped that the results of this work will be seen in classrooms in the very near future. A great deal still needs to be done in this field of Arts education.